

Harptrees History Society

The Society holds monthly meetings from September to April and outings in May, June and July. The subjects and visits are wide ranging but predominantly relate to the local area. The Society usually meets on the last Wednesday of the month at West Harptree Hall. The doors open at 7.00 pm and talks commence at 7.30 pm.

We are a friendly and informal group and welcome new members or the occasional visitor at any time. The charge is £1.00 for members and £3.00 for visitors. The annual membership is £4.00, which entitles the member to a reduced entry fee to events, prior booking. For special events and a free copy of the Society Journal with annual programme events. We have a research group who meet regularly and work jointly on local history projects, but each of us have our own area of interest and expertise including family, local and building history. We hold local history exhibitions and have written two books. We can give advice on how to start personal research and welcome anyone who would like to get involved and join us.

For further information call Lesley on 01761 221758 or Andrew on 0176 221941.

Some Historical Notes on East Harptree Village The earliest evidences of man in the area are the late Neolithic Priddy Circles and some Bronze Age round barrows both of which were originally within the parish. Close to the parish the Romans mined lead at Charterhouse, on top of Mendip, and farmed at Chew Park now under Chew Valley Lake and left as their legacy a length of roman road now called Stratford Lane. East Harptree can, however, lay claim to the priceless collection of about 1500 largely mint condition Roman coins all dating from the 4th century which is known as the Harptree Hoard. These were discovered in a pewter jar buried in Harptree Woods in 1887 by William Currell and given to the landowner W.W. Kettlewell. The British Museum retained the best while Col. Kettlewell, his son, gave the jug and some coins for display in the church where they were subsequently stolen, and the remainder were dissipated without trace. East and West Harptree were probably once a large Saxon estate but by 1084 they had become two. Before 1066 East Harptree was held as three manors but after it was held as two. The first references to East and West Harptree appear about the last quarter of the 12th century. It has been suggested that East Harptree is a deliberately planned village because of its layout and position.

Harptrees medieval importance can be inferred as it was the site of one of the few Norman castle in the Mendips. Richmond Castle, of which very little remains, was sited on the eastern side of Harptree Coombe and probably dates from the late 11th century. As with most Norman castles it would have been initially built in wood and later strengthened and enlarged in stone. In 1138 it was captured from William Fitz John of Harptree by King Stephen during the civil war with Maud. It was later retaken by Robert of Gloucester in around 1140. There are several other mentions of the castle in documents of the 13th and 14th century but by the mid 16th century Sir John Newton was reusing the stone to build a new house at Eastwood. The church was granted to Wells Cathedral in the late 12th century. The present building dates from various periods but is mainly Perpendicular in style although there are some remains of an earlier Norman church. Particularly notable is the huge, richly carved, canopied monument to Sir John Newton who died in 1568. He is portrayed in armour with kneeling before him his 8 sons and 12 daughters. The head of a late 12th century stone cross, now in Taunton Museum was discovered in 1869.

The village's medieval importance can be further measured by it holding title to one of the four Lordships of the mining rights for the whole of the Mendips. Mining, particularly of lead, but also of calamine, continued in the area with peaks of activity around the mid 17th, 18th and 19th centuries until it finally ceased in the 1890s. The only remains of this industry is the gruffy ground in the upper Coombe, the slag heaps and the lone chimney on Smitham's Hill. Lower down the hill was the site of a brick and tile works which flourished in the village during the 18th century. There were mills on the River Chew and its tributaries at Coley, and Shrowle. The grist mill at Coley was the last working mill in the parish closing in the early 1930s. Agriculture has always been the core industry of the parish and a mile outside the village is Eastwood Manor Farm which is a listed monument. This unique farmstead was rebuilt as a model farm in 1858 and incorporated the most innovative and progressive ideas in agriculture for the period.

There have been three accounts of life in East Harptree written in the last 100 years. In 1927 Mrs W Kettlewell, of Harptree Court, published a small book titled Trinkum Trinkums which describes life in the village through her observations from 1875 to 1927. In 1953 the Womens Institute produced for a village history competition to celebrate the Queen's coronation a History of East Harptree which contains many observations of contemporary village life. Finally for the millennium Jon Budd compiled and wrote East Harptree, Times Remembered Times Forgotten.